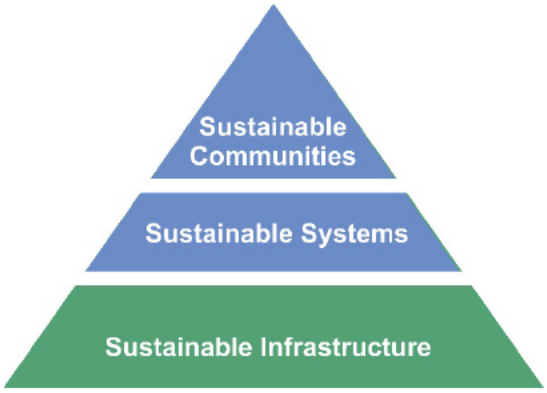
Project Title – National Priority Area 3: Training and Technical Assistance for Small Publicly-Owned Wastewater Systems and Onsite/Decentralized Wastewater Systems to Help Improve Water Quality



Funding Opportunity Number: EPA-OW-OGWDW-14-01

Submitted by:

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B. Executive Summary

The **National Rural Water Association** (NRWA), a non-profit 501(c)(6) organization, is the premier provider of training and technical assistance to rural and small communities throughout the United States. NRWA provides needed assistance through 49 State Rural Water Association offices.[1] We have both the infrastructure and experience to successfully provide training and technical assistance on a nationwide basis to small publicly-owned wastewater systems and onsite/decentralized wastewater systems. NRWA has a solid record of effective performance on contracts of similar size and scope, achieving goals and objectives within allotted time periods.

This proposal addresses **National Priority Area 3** by implementing a Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) program for small publicly-owned wastewater systems and onsite/ decentralized wastewater systems to help improve water quality. NRWA will achieve successful delivery of the grant objectives through the trusted relationships we have built over the past 36 years with the nation's rural and small utilities and regulatory agency personnel.

[redacted]

NRWA's proposed program will help improve water quality by providing classroom instruction on **Sustainable Utility Management** using tools developed by EPA and USDA. Workshops will be conducted to introduce rural and small water and wastewater systems to the ten key areas of effectively managed systems, as well as provide instruction and assistance on how to conduct a system assessment process based on the key management areas. [redacted] The existing NRWA/EPA *Sustainable Management for Small Systems* mobile app will be improved upon and promoted at workshops and online.

NRWA is the largest water and wastewater utility association in the nation, with over 30,000 members.

Onsite/decentralized wastewater systems will receive training on alternative treatment options and in forming Responsible Management Entities (RMEs). Training will be accomplished via webinar. [redacted] Outreach to individual system owners and the public will be accomplished by developing a promotional campaign for the existing NRWA/EPA *Septic InSight* mobile app.

Training and technical assistance will be conducted primarily face-to-face in a classroom and/or at individual water systems. [redacted] NRWA will perform all T/TA in collaboration with appropriate state regulatory agencies.

[1] Due to geographic size, Connecticut and Rhode Island are most efficiently served by one State Association office.

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C. Work Plan

1. National Priority Area

This proposal addresses the EPA's National Priority Area 3 by providing workshops and follow-up technical assistance in sustainable utility management, alternative treatment options and RMEs. The scope of work will support the EPA's Strategic Plan; Goal 2: Protecting America's Waters, Objective 2.2: **Protect and Restore Watersheds and Aquatic Ecosystems**.

There are an estimated 14,780 centralized wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs) in the U.S., compared to 51,000 public water supplies. Over 12,500 of these WWTPs are small, discharging less than one million gallons per day. In 2007, EPA estimated 20 percent (26.1 million) of total U.S. housing units were served by septic systems. Effective management of small publicly-owned wastewater systems and onsite/decentralized systems is directly connected to their ability to comply and maintain compliance with regulatory requirements and protect or improve water quality.

Establishing sustainable management practices in systems takes more than webinars, booklets, or one day of training; it requires assistance and support over an extended period of time. NRWA state offices have the resources, credible in-state field staff, and ability to provide long-term support beyond the timeframe of this grant.

This proposal will use traditional classroom workshops supplemented with innovative non-traditional approaches to reinforce the workshop content and reach the different audiences in an efficient and effective manner, as described below.

Element (a): T/TA for Small Publicly-Owned Wastewater Systems: Small publicly-owned wastewater systems (<1 MGD) will be the primary audience of sustainable management workshops. Follow-up assessments and technical assistance to specific systems that attended a workshop will assess performance in ten key management areas, develop improvement plans, and present recommendations to governing officials. The format for all training activities in this element will be the EPA/RUS *Workshop in a Box* materials, and participants will receive the *Rural and Small Systems Guidebook to Sustainable Utility Management,* including developed supplemental materials.

Element (b): T/TA for Onsite/Decentralized Wastewater Systems: NRWA recognizes that there is a large need for specialized training and assistance to onsite/decentralized wastewater systems. Providing cost-effective assistance to these systems is challenging, in general due to the dispersed nature of the systems themselves, low priority given to maintenance by owners, and lack of professional staff. [redacted]

The typical homeowner or resident has little knowledge of how a septic system works or how their behavior and habits impact its efficiency and subsequent cost. [redacted]

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NRWA's approach to addressing National Priority Area 3 includes four specific tasks:

Task #1: Consult with the appropriate state regulatory agencies or regional EPA.

- [redacted]

Task #2: Conduct a nationwide training program that supports sustainable utility management and improves operational performance.

- Provide [redacted] **Sustainable Utility Management** workshops ([redacted]) using established EPA/RUS materials
- [redacted]
- [redacted]
- Produce and conduct [redacted] webinars that cover sustainable utility management, energy efficiency, and forming Responsible Management Entities (RMEs)
- Identify [redacted] onsite/decentralized wastewater systems nationwide and provide a personalized invitation to attend the RME webinar
- [redacted]
- [redacted]

Task #3: Transfer results, successful compliance strategies and resources developed.

- [redacted]
- [redacted]
- [redacted]

Task #4: Document the performance of the grant.

- [redacted]

Consultation with Agencies

[redacted]

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a mutually agreeable communications protocol to keep agency contacts informed of T/TA provided. Proposed locations and scheduling for the Sustainable Utility Management workshops will be discussed. Agencies contacts will be invited to support and participate in the workshops, if feasible.

Sustainable Utility Management

NRWA state offices will schedule, promote, and conduct [redacted] Sustainable Utility Management workshops targeted towards small publicly-owned wastewater systems in all 50 states. The *Rural and Small Systems Guidebook to Sustainable Utility Management* will be provided to all attendees, including supplemental materials developed by EPA/RUS. The goal of the workshops will be to provide utility managers and staff with useful, concise reference points to help them improve organization-wide performance.

[redacted]

Technical assistance will be offered to [redacted] systems who attend a workshop. On-site TA will work with managers of specific systems to improve performance in one of the ten areas, and help their systems become more successful, resilient, and sustainable for the long-term. [redacted] Utilities will be encouraged to incorporate the improvement plan into their annual budget as appropriate.

E-Learning Technology

Innovative e-learning methods will be utilized to build on knowledge gained in classroom training sessions, provide stand-alone training opportunities, and provide program coverage in the U.S. Territories. NRWA has gained substantial experience designing and delivering successful webinars, [redacted] NRWA will organize, publicize, and conduct [redacted] webinars on:

- Introduction to Sustainable Utility Management for Small Water & Wastewater Systems
- Sustainable Utility Management: Developing System Management Improvement Plans
- Introduction to Performing Energy Use Assessments at Water and Wastewater Systems
- Benefits of Responsible Management Entities (RMEs) for Onsite/Decentralized Wastewater Systems

[redacted]

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[redacted]

[redacted]

2. Providing Training and Technical Assistance on a National Basis

This work plan will be nationwide in coverage and provide [redacted] workshops using the multi-system workshop model as outlined in the EPA/USDA *Workshop in a Box*, with the ten key management areas and self-assessment templates used as the course content.

[redacted]

Technical assistance will be provided as follow-up to assist [redacted] in system assessments, along with the creation and implementation of management improvement plans that present results and recommendations to governing boards and councils. [redacted]

[redacted]

Reaching Tribal Communities

Tribally-owned water systems are an integral part of NRWA, and their representatives serve on state Rural Water Association boards, routinely attend Rural Water training, and access technical assistance from NRWA state offices. Tribal systems currently receive all training communications, magazines and internet notifications. [redacted]

Tribal Systems

[redacted]

[redacted]

Ensuring Effective Knowledge Transfer

The transfer of effective strategies is inherent within the conduct of the training we propose. Small system participants learn from interaction with their peers in the workshop format, and these lessons are transferred to others during the on-site training and technical assistance NRWA provides. [redacted] In addition, effective strategies will be transferred by posting resources, success stories, and resources online.

3. Environmental Results and Measuring Progress

3a. Stated Objective/Link to EPA Strategic Plan – The main objective of NRWA's proposed training program is [redacted] The secondary objective is [redacted] These program objectives will improve public health and water quality, and are in direct support of EPA's Strategic Plan; Goal 2: Protecting America's Waters, Objective 2.1: Protect Human Health and Objective 2.2: Protect and Restore Watersheds and Aquatic Ecosystems.

3b. Results of Activities (Outputs) – The tasks outlined in this work plan will achieve the following environmental outputs over the course of the 12-month program:

- [redacted]

3c. Projected Environmental Improvement (Outcomes) – The following environmental outcomes will result from carrying out NRWA's proposed T/TA program:

- [redacted]

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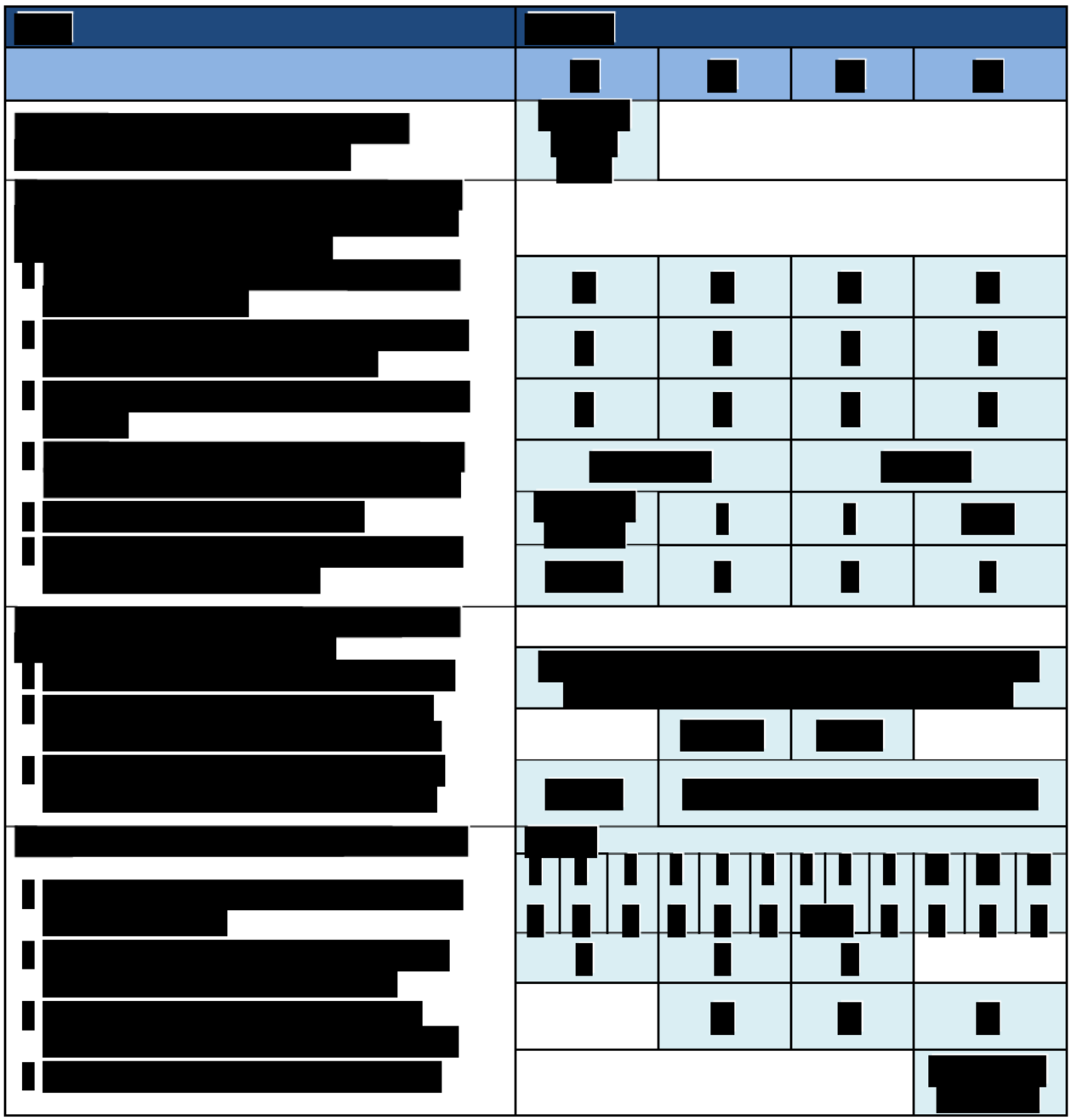
4. Milestone Schedule

NRWA continuously monitors each task and milestone activity in each state office as it relates to performance of the task, timeframe and expenditure of funds. This management process ensures a timely and efficient manner for delivery of the tasks and expenditure of funds. Our effectiveness is demonstrated in the EPA Annual Programmatic Review Report for the recently completed NPA 1 grant (see Attachment I). A projected milestone schedule for the one-year project period is shown in Table 1 below. This table includes a breakout of project activities with associated tasks and timeframes.

[redacted]



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[redacted]

6. Programmatic Capability/Experience/Community Support

6a. Organizational Experience – NRWA has the necessary infrastructure already in place in each state, and has the ability to successfully implement this grant immediately upon award. NRWA's reputation is grounded in providing classroom training and face-to-face technical assistance to small water and wastewater systems. NRWA has extensive experience in providing training and technical assistance as evident from previous grants with EPA.

NRWA has a proven track record of successfully completing projects and delivering results since 1978. Successes include annual grants with the Environmental Protection Agency [redacted]

NRWA's method of program management and monitoring has proven to be an effective system for managing a dispersed workforce, while at the same time improving the quality of technical assistance being provided. [redacted] This strong commitment to training has been instrumental in establishing the high level of professionalism and expertise embodied in the programs and services provided to rural and small wastewater systems.

6b. Staff Expertise/Qualifications – [redacted] As evident by the community support letters (see Attachment IV), NRWA trainers have the skills [redacted]

[redacted]

Sam Wade, CEO – As the CEO, Sam Wade is responsible for NRWA's overall performance. He has served in executive management with NRWA since 1988. Mr. Wade brings extensive knowledge to the organization; he holds water and wastewater operator licenses in Minnesota, has managed a small utility funded by RUS loans, and served as the Executive Director for Minnesota Rural Water Association.

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Matthew Holmes, DCEO – Matthew Holmes is responsible for NRWA operations and serves on the senior management of all grants and programs; he has served in this capacity since January 2014. Mr. Holmes holds a Master of Arts in Environmental Economics and was the Executive Director for New Mexico Rural Water Association from 2000 to 2014. Mr. Holmes will be responsible for the overall implementation and oversight of the project.

Claudette Atwood, CFO – Claudette Atwood is responsible for financial management and oversight of all NRWA federal programs and NRWA's budget, finances, and investments. Ms. Atwood is an experienced CPA and ensures all expenditures are made in accordance with CFR rules and regulations. She has managed NRWA's finances since 1988, including the financial components of NRWA's grants. Ms. Atwood will be responsible for ensuring the fiscal and technical success of the grant.

[redacted]

Bill O'Connell, Program Manager – Mr. O'Connell will manage the day-to-day performance of the grant, and will be responsible for providing progress reports to the EPA Project Officer. He has successfully managed seven grants of this scope for NRWA since 2006, meeting all required program deliverables on time and on budget. Prior to 2006, Mr. O'Connell spent 12 years with the Montana Rural Water Association providing training, technical assistance, and source water protection to rural and small public water systems. Mr. O'Connell received a Bachelor of Science in Geological Engineering from Montana College of Mineral Science and Technology.

Biographical sketches of key NRWA management staff are included as Attachment II, and key NRWA state office training staff resumes are included as Attachment III.

6c. Community Support - NRWA is the largest water and wastewater utility membership organization in the nation, representing over 30,000 utility members. NRWA has [redacted] **support letters** on file demonstrating an unparalleled level of community support. Fifteen sample letters are included to document that NRWA's approach to service delivery is fully responsive to the needs of small wastewater systems (see Attachment IV).

7. Past Performance

NRWA has successfully completed grants with the Environmental Protection Agency since 1978 with no audit findings or exceptions. All grant-funded projects were successfully completed with all goals/deliverables and technical reports completed within the milestone timeframes. All federal reporting requirements attached to the grants, including annual audits and CFR compliance, were successfully completed and documented. Detailed internal reporting enabled NRWA to assess progress towards meeting environmental outputs and outcomes.

Each of the grants listed in Table 3 on page 12 was nationwide in scope and provided training and technical assistance to rural and small public water systems.

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Table 3: Recent Grant Performance

Agency	Type	Number	Grant Period	Scope of Work	Completion of Goals and Objectives
EPA	Grant	EM83477401	Sept 1, 2010 to Sept 30, 2011	Nationwide SDWA Training & Technical Assistance Federal Award - $13,000,000	100%
EPA	Grant	X6-83536001	Sept 1, 2012 to Aug 31, 2013	Nationwide SDWA Training & Technical Assistance Federal Award - $6,987,500	100%
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]

8. Quality Assurance/Quality Control

This project will use established public data that is already available and will not generate any data that is subject to Quality Assurance and Control provisions.

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